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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4364  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3183  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9952  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3274  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0373  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2352  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6876  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4734  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1352

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001540

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: MUSLIM MASSACRE; GSL INDICTS TIGERS,  
MUSLIMS BLAME SECURITY TASK FORCE

REF: A. COLOMBO 1531 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1286 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 976 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Responsibility for the September 18 murders of 10 Muslim laborers south of Arugam Bay on the eastern coast remains unclear. This lack of clarity highlights the need for an independent Sri Lankan institution that can investigate human rights cases and leads us to question the best ways to invigorate such a body. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On the morning of September 18, 10 Muslims were found reportedly "hacked to death by machete" in the eastern coastal Ampara district, five kilometers south of the USAID-funded Arugam Bay bridge in Pottuvil(ref A). The men had been renovating an irrigation sluice gate under the supervision of a Muslim contractor. The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) on September 19, citing the testimony of a sole surviving Muslim laborer, publicly accused the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of the murders. The LTTE, in turn, claimed in a statement released September 19 that "the Sri Lankan military has a long tradition of blaming the LTTE for the atrocities it commits."

[1](#)3. (C) Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader Rauf Hakeem's refuted the GSL's indictment of the LTTE, claiming tensions have been high between civilians and police Special Task Force (STF) officers in the Ampara district. The GSL dismissed Hakeem's demand that an international commission investigate the murders, announcing a pending investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Sri Lanka Police. Another Muslim leader, Railways Minister A.H.M. Fowzie, told the press: "The LTTE have been known for this kind of killing."

[1](#)4. (C) Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) spokesperson Thorfinnur Omarsson told poloff on September 20 that monitors who visited the site on the afternoon of September 19 had not made a ruling on the incident. SLMM Chief Major General Lars Solvberg told Ambassador Blake during a September 19 meeting, however, that the killings had taken place in an area

unofficially under LTTE control.

¶5. (C) A USAID officer traveling near Arugam Bay told us that on September 20, approximately 1000 Muslims in Pottuvil gathered in a demonstration demanding that the STF chief be investigated and transferred following the September 18 murders. The demonstrators were reportedly carrying machetes and marching toward a Sinhalese area, Ulla. According to USAID, the Arugam Bay bridge has been closed and some Sinhalese are fleeing the area in boats. One Amcit, in contact with conoff, has been trapped in her Arugam Bay hotel by the riots. The Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) desk officer in Ampara told poloff that the STF had opened fire on Muslim demonstrators throwing stones at the police. SLMM spokesman Omarsson told poloff that monitors had heard unconfirmed reports that two to four Muslims had been killed this morning in Pottuvil. USAID sources claimed that two Muslims were injured while trying to enter an STF compound.

¶6. (C) Comment: As in many cases, the facts regarding the Muslim massacre remain murky at best. This lack of clarity underlines the need for an independent Sri Lankan institution that can investigate and attempt to make reasonable judgments. One problem is that the institutions that currently might serve this function, such as the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, are ineffective due to self-censorship and timidity, due in part to the very real threat of retribution from either side. How to invigorate an independent Sri Lankan human rights mechanism should be one of the mandates of the proposed Co-chairs' Human Rights Mission. End Comment.

BLAKE